

Quantitative Analysis of Negation in Two Cree Corpora

In Cree, negation is expressed using one of a selection of particles which precede the verb (see (1) and (2)). The distinction between the particles has been the subject of some debate in the literature. Traditionally, these particles have been claimed to be based on inflectional order (independent/conjunct) (Wolfart 1973), however, some research has raised questions about whether this fully captures the distinction (MacKenzie 1992). In the Plains Cree dialect, for example, it has been claimed that the negative particle is selected based on a combination of clause type (main/subordinate) and mood (realis/irrealis) (Cook 2014). In the Muskeg dialect of Cree (a.k.a. Swampy Cree) negation has predominantly been described in pedagogical materials. Ellis (2000) claims that the distribution of negation is tied to the inflectional order distinction.

- 1) **ekaa** *e-ohci-pe-kiskenitamaan*
 NEG ‘come know’-CONJUNCT
 ‘I had not known them before.’ (LB, Wolfart 1988:40)

- 2) **moona** *kehcin* *ke-kii-šaapošken*
 NEG for sure ‘pass through’-INDEPENDENT
 ‘For certain you won't be able to pass through it.’ (SS, Ellis 1995:48)

The current project attempts to expand our understanding of Cree negation by applying variationist sociolinguistic methods to two corpora of Cree (Plains Cree and Muskeg Cree respectively). The goal is to investigate a) whether the Plains Cree corpus materials support recent claims about how negation works in this dialect, and b) whether the Muskeg dialect has an inflectional order negation pattern (as previously claimed), is consistent with the Plains Cree data, or follows some as-yet undescribed third pattern.

More than 1300 negative utterances were extracted from published oral texts of Cree native speakers, with a variety of genres of language represented. These utterances will be coded for clause type, inflectional order and mood. The results will test whether the negator in each of the two dialects can be statistically predicted from the relevant linguistic factors.

References

- Ellis, C. D. (2000). *Spoken Cree: West Coast of James Bay (Volume 1)*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.
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- Wolfart, H. C. (1973). Plains Cree: A Grammatical Study. *American Philosophical Society Transactions*, 63(5).
- Cook, C. (2014). *The clause-typing system of Plains Cree: indexicality, anaphoricity, and contrast*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.